

The Control of Pharmaceuticals

Dr. Helen B. Taussig, Professor of Pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, has publicized the grim story of a sleeping pill that was commercially sold to pregnant women in Europe before it was discovered that its ingredients could cause abnormal births. It is estimated that the victims of this terrible mistake will ultimately number 5,000 or more deformed babies. The sleeping pill was not introduced in the United States, but it could have been under present law.

As Dr. Taussig points out, the moral of this shocking story is that even more stringent tests of drug safety are needed, further strengthening the case for regulatory legislation such as proposed by Senator Kefauver of Tennessee. President Kennedy has joined the fight for Senator Kefauver's bill by writing Senator Eastland, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to urge prompt and favorable action, and to request inclusion of still further protective measures.

Certainly where reasonable question arises concerning a particular compound, the Government should be able immediately to ban the drug in question and submit it to further tests rather than wait to see if enough reports of damage to human beings come in to prove the lack of safety. People are not guinea pigs, and the law should not permit them to be used as such.